

Dear Representatives,

Hello, we are representatives from the Mandan Middle School Student Council testifying on House Bill 1553. House Bill 1553 states that \$140 million will be taken out of the Legacy Earnings fund from July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2027 where schools may apply for grants to receive free school lunches for that biennium. Students have had conversations about how our families with average to below household income, seem to struggle filling the lunch account. Many other families feel this burden constantly weighing them down and this is why the bill should be passed. We believe that every school in the state would benefit from the passing of House Bill 1553.

We are testifying for this bill because we see constant struggle with many families throughout our entire community with affording lunch fees. A lot of families struggle to deal with the ever-growing lunch debt because it is very difficult to pay for basic living essentials on top of paying for their children's constant lunch bills. Because of this, many students are in the "negatives" or in debt in their lunch account. Kids look forward to lunch, but because they have a low or negative account balance, it becomes a hassle for them because they are constantly reminded of their low or negative lunch balance, making them stressed out. Even families who are paying for reduced lunch costs still struggle with paying the lower prices because the prices are still too high compared to their household income.

Students who don't receive lunches can be negatively affected both physically and mentally. According to [eatingwell.com](https://www.eatingwell.com), when students go without eating meals, their bodies start to produce Cortisol which is used to help regulate blood sugar, but it also makes people stressed out and anxious, making it harder for them to perform well in school. Kids feel burdened as if it is their fault, leading to not only bad eating habits, but also not being able to academically

succeed and negatively impacting social experiences. Students may also have lower energy when they skip a meal because they cannot receive calories, which stops them from getting glucose or energy, making them less energized to do schoolwork, stated eatingwell.com. Students feel held back when focusing on schoolwork when they are hungry because of this. Lunch is a necessity because it is important to get enough nutrients in order to support smart and healthy minds.

Thank you for hearing our testimony and considering our judgement and view on this topic.

Mandan Middle School Student Council